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Checklist and Guidelines for Identifying Young Children's Interests

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Young children are more likely to “stick with” activities and learn new things while involved in activities they find fun and enjoyable. Two types of things that get young children involved in different kinds of activities are children’s personal interests and the people, objects, and events that children find interesting.

Children’s personal interests include the things they like to do and prefer or choose to do, things that make them smile and laugh, things that excite them, and things that keep children engrossed in play. A child who likes to play lap games such as peek-a-boo and who smiles, laughs, and giggles the more a parent plays the game is an example of a personal interest.

The different things people do, the features of objects (e.g., movement), and the characteristics of events young children experience as part of everyday living which get and maintain their attention and involve them in interactions with people, objects, or events, are what we mean by situational interests. A child who comes upon a puddle of water while on a walk with a parent, and who pounces her feet up-and-down in the puddle to splash the water, is an example of a situationally interesting activity.

We now know that children’s word learning, and the use of those words when “talking” to parents and other persons, happen when children are involved in things that interest them (e.g., Nelson, 1999; Silven, 2001). Nelson (1999) found, for example, that language learning was “related easily to a child’s *life activities and interests*” (p. 2, emphasis added).

Interests Checklist

Taking advantage of children’s interests as part of their communication and language learning starts with identifying a child’s interests. The Appendix includes a checklist that can be used to accomplish this goal. The checklist can be completed by a parent, or a practitioner can use the checklist together with a parent, to facilitate the identification of a child’s interests.

The checklist includes more than 80 activities. A person completing the checklist simply marks or checks whether an activity *Is My Child’s Interest* (personal interest) or an activity *Would Be Interesting To My Child* (situational interest). The last page of the checklist includes space for recording *Some of My Child’s Other Interests* (not included in the list of 80+ activities) and *Special Things About My Child* that are or might be important for a child’s learning new things.

Implications for Practice

Once all of the above information is recorded on the checklist, the next step is to pick from all of a child’s interests, the particular activities that are likely to occur most often, can easily fit into your family’s schedule, and which provide the best opportunities for interest-based child learning. It is a good idea to also pick 3 or 4 activities that are “special treats” for a child; things that may not happen often but which are activities that are “to die for” (things that a child gets most excited about).

Now that you have the best activities identified for your child, you are ready to provide your child interest-

based learning opportunities. Use the interest-based activities you came up with on the last page of the checklist as a kind of “reminder list” to increase your child’s participation in the activities. You will be surprised at how much your child does more of what he or she already can do and how much your child begins to learn new things.

References

- Nelson, K. (1999, Winter). Making sense: Language and thought in development. *Developmental Psychologist*, 1-10.
- Silven, M. (2001). Attention in very young infants predicts learning of first words. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 24, 229-237.

Appendix

Child Interests Activity Checklist

Child Interests Activity Checklist

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Child's Name: _____ Child's Age: _____

Name(s) of Person(s) Completing Checklist: _____

Relationship(s) to Child: _____ Date Checklist Completed: _____

Young children are interested in many different things. Studies have shown that children's participation in activities that are interesting to them is filled with powerful learning opportunities, including opportunities to build language and communication skills.

This checklist includes a list of activities that may be of interest to your child or that your child may find interesting. Please read through the list of activities and make a check mark in the boxes to indicate whether an activity is an interest of your child (first column) or is something that you think your child might find interesting (second column). The last page of the checklist includes space for recording interests not listed on this form.

After you have identified activities that are or would be interesting to your child, pick those activities that are most likely to help your child communicate and talk more. There is space for recording up to 12 different activities. This can be used as a reminder list to remember to promote your child's participation in the activities.

Dunst, C. J., Raab, M., & Trivette, C. M. (2013). Child interests activity checklist. In C. J. Dunst & M. Raab (2013). Checklist and guidelines for identifying young children's interests. *Everyday Child Language Learning Tools*, Number 3.

Interests Activity Checklist

This activity . . .	Is my child's interest	Would be interesting to my child	This activity . . .	Is my child's interest	Would be interesting to my child
Being part of feeding/caring for pets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Scribbling on paper	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being part of mealtime conversations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Having pretend phone conversations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Picking up and "naming" toys	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Playing with alphabet blocks or letter magnets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listening to songs or nursery rhymes during bath time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	"Coloring" pictures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talking about colors, body parts, and clothes while dressing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	"Drawing" in sand or dirt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Looking at picture books	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Finger painting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listening to bedtime stories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Using crayons, markers, pens, and pencils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Playing parent/child vocal games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	"Acting out" stories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Looking at photo albums	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Singing songs, nursery rhymes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Snuggling with a parent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Listening to music/songs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Looking at alphabet books	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Playing lap games/finger games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Typing" letters or words on a computer keyboard	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Playing rhyming or naming games	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listening to e-mails, letters, or greeting cards sent to your child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dancing with mom or dad	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Playing lap games like "Peek-a-Boo" or "So Big"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Playing with brother or sister	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Playing naming games like "Where Is Your Nose?"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Listening to TV phrases/jingles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Playing with toys like See 'n Say	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Playing with musical instruments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Riding in a wagon	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cutting/tearing pictures from a magazine or catalog	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Playing in water	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Using play dough, Silly Putty, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Playing with balls/balloons/bubbles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	"Saying" grace at meals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Playing with dolls/stuffed animals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Being part of family meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			Listening to family talks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Interests Activity Checklist

This activity . . .	Is my child's interest	Would be interesting to my child	This activity . . .	Is my child's interest	Would be interesting to my child
Listening to family prayers/spiritual meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Looking at pictures on a restaurant menu	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listening to or saying prayers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Visiting grandparents/relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Singing at a family birthday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Playing with or visiting a friend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listening to holiday conversations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Playing at an indoor play land	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having friends over to play	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Playing on park/playground equipment with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having family gatherings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Listening to/singing songs at a children's festival	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talking on the phone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Going on a hike/nature walk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talking with relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Playing in a stream/creek with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helping plant flowers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Helping family at community garden	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Helping" adult with gardening, yard work, or taking care of plants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Going on a neighborhood walk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Going on family car/bus rides	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Visiting animals at a pet store/zoo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Going on errands with a parent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Feeding ducks at a pond	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Picking out" foods at the grocery store	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Listening to storytellers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Picking up siblings from school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	"Choosing" books at a library	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eating out	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Going to children's concerts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visiting friends and neighbors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Listening to hymns at church	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Going on picnics with family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	"Saying" prayers at church/temple	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shopping at the mall	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Going along to parents' community chorus practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Naming" signs/symbols in the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Going to sister's/brother's club meeting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pointing out symbols	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Going to sister's/brother's ball game	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Saying hellos/good-byes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			

Interests Activity Checklist

Young children develop early language and communication abilities during *many other* interesting activities they engage in on their own or with family members. Please write below additional everyday learning activities of interest to your child:

SOME OF MY CHILD'S OTHER INTERESTS

SPECIAL THINGS ABOUT MY CHILD

INCREASING MY CHILD'S PARTICIPATION IN INTEREST-BASED ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: _____

Activity 2: _____

Activity 3: _____

Activity 4: _____

Activity 5: _____

Activity 6: _____

Activity 7: _____

Activity 8: _____

Activity 9: _____

Activity 10: _____

Activity 11: _____

Activity 12: _____